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GENERAL AND COMPLETE DISARMAMENT

Relationship between disarmament and development

Report of the Secretary-General

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. The General Assembly, following the International Conference on the Relationship between Disarmament and Development, which was held in New York from 24 August to 11 September 1987, in its resolution 42/45 of 30 November 1987, requested the Secretary-General to take action through the appropriate organs, within available resources, for the implementation of the action programme adopted at the Conference.

2. In pursuance of paragraph 35 (ix) b of the Final Document of the Conference, 1/ the Secretary-General established, in December 1987, a high-level intra-Secretariat task force having the following composition: the Director-General for Development and International Economic Cooperation, Chairman; the Under-Secretary-General, Department of International Economic and Social Affairs; the Under-Secretary-General, Department of Public Information; the Assistant Secretary-General, Office for Research and the Collection of Information; and the Under-Secretary-General, Department for Disarmament Affairs, convener.

3. The Secretary-General, in his report entitled "New dimensions of arms regulation and disarmament in the post-cold-war era" (A/C.1/47/7), referred to the need for significant advances in the reduction and limitation of armaments in order to initiate the conversion from military to civilian production. Conversion, as is apparent from recent experience, is not an easy task; it requires great effort and sacrifice. In many countries, in particular those which are economically advanced, there are large segments of the population dependent on military production. Restructuring industry and retraining skilled and unskilled labour will have a debilitating effect on many economies. The arms industry and the military establishment, which usually enjoy considerable privileges, will resist those changes. The financial and ecological burdens of effective weapons disposal, he said, are the immediate, and unavoidable, consequences of implementing reductions. Much more far-reaching is the problem of redirecting manufacturing and research-and-development capacities, as well as soldiers and technical personnel, from military to civilian endeavours. Member States were urged to consider methods to alleviate the problems of making the painful transition to a post-disarmament world. The Secretary-General stated that he is establishing an interdepartmental task force at the United Nations to provide Member States with political, technical and economic advice on the various aspects involved in such a transition. The Secretary-General has recently requested the secretariat of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) to coordinate the establishment of the United Nations interdepartmental task force on conversion. Other offices to be included in the task force could be the Office for Disarmament Affairs, the Office for Outer Space Affairs, the Department of Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development, the Department of Development and Support and Management Services, and the United Nations Development Programme. Furthermore, UNCTAD should serve as coordinator of the task force, prepare a preliminary proposal for its organization and programme of work, and convene an organizational meeting of the concerned offices and agencies.

4. The Secretary-General reported to the General Assembly at its forty-seventh session, inter alia, on the specific activities carried out by the Secretariat

under severe resources constraints (see A/47/452). The Assembly, in its resolution 47/52 F of 9 December 1992, welcomed the report of the Secretary-General and requested him to continue to take action, through appropriate organs and within available resources, for the implementation of the action programme adopted at the International Conference, and to submit a report to it at its forty-eighth session.

II. SPECIFIC ACTIVITIES

5. The following specific activities, in accordance with the priorities established by the task force for the period 1990-1993 (see A/45/592, A/46/527 and A/47/452), were carried out under financial constraints.

A. United Nations Conference on Conversion of the Aerospace Complex: Technology Assessment for Development

6. The Office for Disarmament Affairs participated in the United Nations Conference on Conversion of the Aerospace Complex: Technology Assessment for Development, which was organized by the Science, Technology, Environment and Resources Division of the Department of Economic and Social Development, together with the Government of the Russian Federation, in Moscow from 12 to 17 October 1992, in collaboration with the Office for Disarmament Affairs; the Outer Space Affairs Division of the Department of Political Affairs; the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO); the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO); the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) and other interested United Nations agencies.

7. The Conference convened on the basis of contributions from experts in the areas of conversion and disarmament, science and technology policies, technology assessment of aerospace technologies and development financing, as well as on the results of the conferences on conversion convened in Beijing in October 1991 and at Dortmont in February 1992.

8. At the Conference, it was stated that a central goal of the United Nations activities to assist countries in making the change necessary is to determine ways in which conversion can be used as a vehicle for development. The nature of space technology lends itself to conversion for development purposes. Many current space systems, such as satellite, launch vehicles and facilities, and ground data-receiving stations are already routinely used for both military and civilian purposes. Even in those countries where there is a clear distinction between military and civilian space programmes, the technology used for those efforts is largely the same. Conversion of these technologies and others to peaceful uses can take many forms. Some military space systems, such as launch vehicles and satellites can easily perform civilian functions with a minimum of modifications. In other cases, government choices of conversion policies will depend largely on international politics, national economic policies and private-sector and consumer demand, as well as technological constraints.

9. The need for international cooperation in tackling the numerous potential economic and national security problems was stressed, especially in the steps

that must be taken to ensure that the global economy has the capacity to absorb new production and to provide the political and economic stability that is an essential prerequisite to substantial private-sector involvement. Such involvement is vital to finding market-oriented solutions to the problems of conversion. It was pointed out that providing solutions to the problems associated with conversion should become an integral goal of international economic and technical assistance programmes and should serve as the foundation for private investment. The conversion of military industries to productive peaceful uses is inherently an international problem which requires international solutions. The United Nations is determined to assist Governments and other international organizations in this effort.

10. As a result of the deliberation, a declaration was issued in which the participants from 26 States indicated that, as the nations of the world disengage from the Cold War, the new international security environment requires that they reduce their military burdens and convert these scientific, technological, industrial and human resources to meet the most crucial or pressing environmental, social and economic problems now facing the people of the world. The challenge is to establish a comprehensive conversion process which will minimize the economic dislocation stemming from world-wide reductions in military spending, while maximizing the economic, social and environmental potential in civilian fields. A verifiable disarmament process must accompany the conversion of military resources to ensure the security of all nations and to decrease the threat of proliferation of weapons and conflict among States.

11. The participants declared that the aerospace complex today constitutes one of the highest achievements of the world's scientific, technological and economic capabilities. The loss of that potential through military reductions without an appropriate conversion process would impede the world's scientific and technological progress and would produce negative consequences on a national and global scale. They believed that conversion of the aerospace complex must be based on a comprehensive strategy considering political, economic, social and ecological implications. Successful conversion requires the coordinated efforts of national Governments and commercial enterprises, together with relevant scientists and experts. Advance conversion planning must be an integral part of the transition from intercountry military confrontation to a new global environment founded on scientific, technological and economic cooperation.

12. The participants at the Conference made a number of concrete recommendations to enhance considerably the prospects of implementation of conversion activities undertaken at the level of international, national and aerospace enterprises and commercial companies.

B. Conference on International Cooperation to Promote Conversion from Military to Civilian Industry

13. The Conference on International Cooperation to Promote Conversion from Military to Civilian Industry was organized by the China Association for Peaceful Use of Military and Industrial Technology and the Office of Legal Advisory Services for Development in the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Development, in Hong Kong, from 7 to 10 July 1993. The Conference provided a forum for eminent defence and civilian industrialists and

entrepreneurs, government leaders, economists and other academic researchers at the request of the Member States, in order to keep up to date on the status of conversion activities at the international and national levels, to share and learn the achievements and lessons of other countries and to establish new contacts for future collaboration on conversion. It also enabled them to identify policy options and managerial and technical solutions and propose to the concerned Government a portfolio of concrete initiatives for international cooperation to tackle the problems they are facing.

14. The focus of the Hong Kong Conference, which brought together 92 participants from 18 States Members of the United Nations, was on the enabling environment for and the pragmatic approaches to conversion and the opportunities for international cooperation. A special effort was made to bring into the conference experts from public and private industry, to emphasize the practical issues and options of the conversion process. In addition to the international perspective, a session was held to present and discuss the Chinese conversion experience. The subjects covered included nuclear industry, military medicine, shipbuilding, electronics, aeronautical and aerospace industries, intellectual property and international cooperation.

15. The concept of conversion considered by the Conference includes the transformation of military manufacturing facilities into civilian production at the same site, or the establishment of new manufacturing or service capability elsewhere. In both cases, such new production can be based on technologies emanating from such military research as manufacturing, as acquired from other resources. Finally, conversion is also achieved by the reallocation of military budgets (including the use of military resources, such as personnel) for civilian purposes.

16. The participants of the Conference issued a declaration in which they agreed that international peace and sustainable development are common desires of the peoples of the world. Disarmament and peace reinforce each other. Military to civilian conversion is an indispensable link in strengthening disarmament and peace.

17. Military to civilian conversion takes different paths and forms in different countries, but its components are universally the same. It involves conversion of military research and manufacturing capabilities to civilian use; peaceful uses of military technology; conversion of military equipment and facilities for civilian uses or the dual use of the same; and mobilization of displaced military and non-military personnel in affected communities. Military-to-civilian conversion is a complex process which involves the military, political, economic, technological and social aspects of a country. It requires active planning, wise government policies, and the engagement of all relevant actors in military-industrial complexes, including both public and private components.

18. A benign international environment, including political, economic, and other factors, and a spirit of cooperation between government and non-government actors is essential. In that sense, a key factor is the maintenance of regional stability and confidence. In recent years, the United Nations has conducted considerable useful work in that area, which is appreciated by the international

community. The United Nations, however, should play an even more active role in the future.

19. Finally, the Conference proposed the following recommendations to appropriate actors in the world community:

(a) Given the diversity and complexity of the conversion process, it is important that the forms and forums for international cooperation, exchanges and research in support of military-to-civilian conversion be expanded. Support to conversion initiative should become an item of priority in the mandates of a broad range of international organizations. The United Nations should continue to play a leading role in implementing this recommendation by vigorously implementing the mandates entrusted to it for activities in this field.

(b) Multilateral and private financial institutions should address the funding requirement of conversion on a priority basis, employing both conventional and non-conventional financing mechanisms. Governments should be encouraged to set commercial incentives for conversion efforts.

(c) Training plays an important role in conversion. It helps develop new skills required for success in civilian markets, particularly to change attitudes of personnel whose professional experience is confined mainly to military research and manufacturing. Training is most helpful to the conversion process of countries which are in transition from centrally planned to market-oriented economies.

(d) Information is a crucial resource in the conversion process. It must be collected, processed and effectively disseminated to promote conversion by official and unofficial channels alike. Thus, it is recommended that the United Nations should prepare and disseminate an annual report of progress achieved on conversion all over the world.

C. 1993 substantive session of the United Nations Disarmament Commission

20. At its annual substantive session held in 1993, the Disarmament Commission while considering, inter alia, the role of science and technology in the context of international security, disarmament and the transfer of high technology with military applications, it has recommended that every effort should be made to apply scientific and technological resources, currently dedicated to military ends, to related activities in other fields, such as economic and social development, conversion, the protection of the environment and other peaceful purposes. In that connection, States should seek opportunities to convert military resources and production facilities to civilian use when decisions are taken to reduce military equipment and armaments, thereby strengthening international security. As conversion offers to many economies the prospect of significant long-term benefits, States should be encouraged to engage in international dialogue on the application of science and technology for conversion with a view to facilitating the formulation and successful implementation of national policies. During the course of deliberations, in this regard, it was proposed to recommend that the United Nations should

contribute to the promotion of applications of science and technology for conversion of military resources and production facilities to civilian uses.

Notes

1/ United Nations publication, Sales No. E.87.IV.8.